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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Wednesday, March 4, 1936

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "GREENS FOR SPRING MEALS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, United States Department of Agriculture.

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Listeners, when the month of March arrives, no matter if it arrives like a lion, I always begin to think about spring greens. The first new shoots that come up in the garden, and the tender, fresh, green leaves of the woods and meadows -- I'm always ready to use these in March meals. If you go out and gather wild greens from the fields, you can serve your family a spring treat, free of cost. Many wild plants that later may bother you as "weeds", make delicious early spring food while they are tender and delicate in flavor.

You know, our grandmothers were not far wrong in their ideas that greens were the best of spring tonics. Of course, they had never heard that greens offered a good supply of minerals and vitamins, which the family had been running low on all winter. But they had learned from experience that when the green season came in, the family began to pick up in health and spirits. Fresh new greens, either the wild or the garden varieties, have other good qualities beside their minerals and vitamins. They have a refreshing bright green color and a refreshing taste, if -- and here's the catch -- if they are cooked correctly.

Whenever anyone announces to me that he does not care for greens, I suspect then and there that what he has been served under the name of "greens" are just sorry "has-beens" -- good green leaves that have been cooked to a brown, mushy, unappetizing mass. I don't care for a dish of those myself, no matter how hungry I am.

But anyone who likes food that looks good and tastes good, can easily do right by spring greens. Keeping greens green is easy. Just cook them as short a time as possible in an open kettle. And have the cooking water slightly salted and boiling briskly when the greens go in.

How much water to use? Well, to save minerals and vitamins that might dissolve in the water and thus be lost, use as little water as possible. That's the way to be extra-frugal with food value. Cooking in a large amount of boiling salted water will preserve the beautiful green color, but it means some loss of food value. With a smaller amount of cooking water, you will waste less food value. If you leave the kettle uncovered and cook the greens until just tender, you'll preserve both color and more of the food value.

But thumbs down on long cooking or slow cooking or a lid on the kettle. Treat good greens that way and they will come out olive-drab in color and very dreary looking.

Now the question of soda for cooking green vegetables. This is a subject we have talked over many times before. But it always comes up in spring along with the greens. Does a pinch of soda in the cooking water help keep the green color? It does. But the nutrition people say thumbs down on soda just the same. They say soda destroys the vitamins. And vitamins are one of the big reasons for eating greens. And soda spoils some of the good fresh flavor. Even a little pinch of soda can do damage.

Anyway, you don't need soda, not even for color. If you cook any green vegetables rapidly in an open kettle, it will keep its natural color with no outside aid.

Perhaps you have noticed that a blend of flavors -- several used together--- makes a dish extra good. This holds true with greens as with other foods. The foods people at the Bureau of Home Economics, who made a study of vegetable cookery, tell me that a combination of different greens makes an especially delicious dish. They say that greens with a slightly bitter flavor, like dandelions, for example, make a nice contrast with those of a milder taste, such as spinach. Try cooking dandelion greens and spinach together and see if you don't agree. Another favorite combination is corn salad and mustard greens. Then a peppery green like watercress makes good company for one that is less sharp in flavor.

Combining different varieties is one way to make your greens different. Another way is to vary the seasoning. There's nothing new about serving greens with butter. But have you tried browned butter over them? Have you tried a bit of onion juice? The vegetable cookery people tell me that a very popular way to serve any kind of chopped cooked greens is with bacon, fried crisp and broken in small pieces, over the top, and with a little of the bacon fat poured over to add richness and flavor. In the South they cook greens with salt pork. Still another favorite seasoning for spring greens is a mixture of olive oil, salt, and vinegar or lemon juice with perhaps a little celery seed or celery salt.

These seasoning ideas hold good for turnip or beet tops, for chard, spinach, and all the other "edible leaves" that you can buy at the market, or gather from your own garden or fields at this season.

Among the common weeds that make good potherbs or salad greens when they first come up in the spring are pusley or purslane, a wild relative of our garden-flower the portulaca. The crisp flat leaves of purslane taste something like cress but are a bit sharper. Pusley is good to eat either cooked or raw.

Other weeds for eating are the tender first leaves of the dandelion, the new shoots of the wild leek, and that plant that some people call lamb's quarters, and others call goosefoot, or pigweed. Lamb's quarters you'll find in damp spring fields. Cook the tender tips and leaves for about 5 minutes in boiling lightly salted water.

Other wild leaves to gather early in the year are from a plant called redroot, or redroot-amaranth, according to the botanists. This weed grows almost everywhere in the United States except in the extreme north. It makes excellent broth and delicious greens.

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